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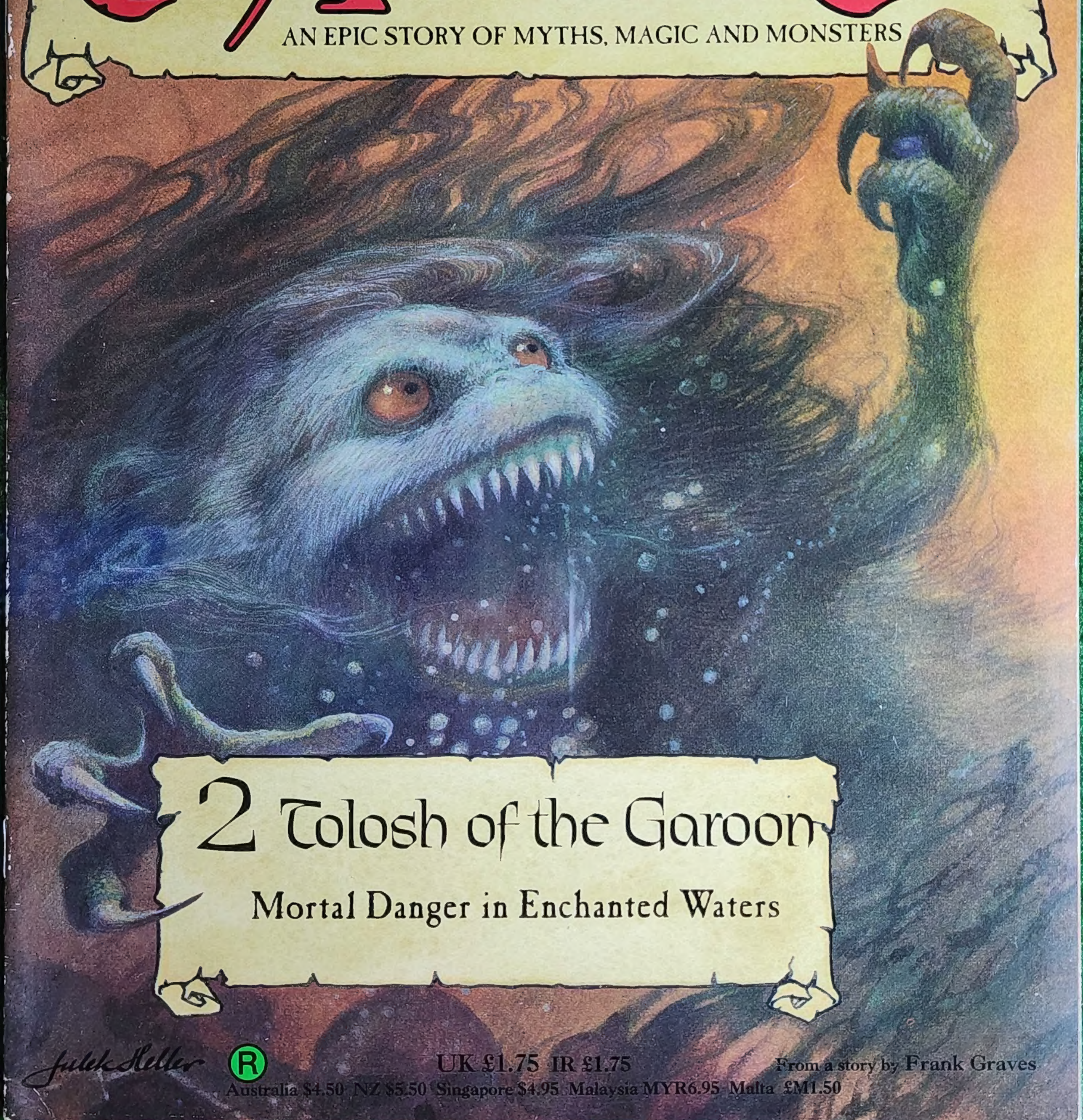
2

IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS



2 Tolosh of the Garoon

Mortal Danger in Enchanted Waters

Juliet Heller ®

UK £1.75 IR £1.75

Australia $4.50 NZ $5.50 Singapore $4.95 Malaysia MYR6.95 Malta £M1.50

From a story by Frank Graves

On the Second Day . . .

Rock conceals and grass deceives
But Heroes win the day.
An arrow gold behind the leaves
Shows the brave the way.
Peril, water, death await.
Avoid the tempting hand.
Purple eyes that have no fate
Twice arrive but not too late
To pluck from death the shining Grail
And lead them to another place.

Neither Richard nor Melek could see where Orkan might have gone. Peering nervously around, they left the shelter of the boulders. Then they heard Orkan's strangled calls, "Help! Help! Somebody help me!"

"Orkan! Where are you? I can't see you!" Richard shouted.

"Over here! Near the tree."

Richard scanned the area. "Look, Melek! Down there!" he cried.

Richard and Melek ran over and found Orkan lying spreadeagled on the ground. He was pinned in position by dozens of dark red worms. Their long, thin bodies lanced from the ground and wrapped around Orkan's limbs with a sinewy strength.

"Try and get to my sword!" Orkan said urgently. "Cut these things off. Be careful

where you tread. I think the whole patch is infested."

Gingerly, Richard leaned forward and pulled Orkan's sword from its scabbard. He could only just reach, and as his fingertips closed round its pommel, he saw a flickering in the ground. He snatched the weapon and jumped back. Then he went quickly to work on the worms. Once severed, the bodies whipped smartly back into the earth. Soon Orkan jumped free.

"What on earth are they?" Richard asked, watching the last slithery body disappear into the ground.

"Ugh! I don't know," Orkan shuddered.

A SURPRISING FIND

"We've a long way to go yet," Orkan said, taking his sword back off Richard, "and we're bound to see a lot more dangerous beasts before this quest is finished. For now, we'd better get on. Which way does the book say, Melek?"

The dwarf cast a worried glance at Orkan, and tugged nervously at the straps that secured the *Book of Prophecies*.

Then something caught Richard's eye. "What was that sparkling?" he said. "Melek, pass me the book!"

As Melek took the book from his shoulders, Richard carefully inspected it. He saw nothing but dust and parchment. Then the same glint showed as he handed it back.

"There!" Richard said. "There's something in the spine." He pulled out a narrow length of metal which had a glass arrow set into it. The glass was coloured, but Richard could not say precisely what colour it was. First it seemed one, and then another, as if the whole spectrum was battling for supremacy.

"What is it?" he asked Melek.

"It must be the ancient Path Finder!" Melek gasped. "It's one of our oldest treasures. Everyone thought it long lost. Can I see it?"

As Richard handed Melek the mysterious object, the colours in the glass died down and it turned a dull, dusty grey.

"I don't know how it works," Melek said, "but if our legends are true, it

should guide you to your heart's desire on the path of life."

"Well, our lives depend on the pods now," Richard said, "so if we want to find one, this should show us the way?"

"That's right," Melek replied.

Grasping the instrument in his hand, Richard swung it in an arc across the plain. Nothing happened at first, but as he turned, the tip of the arrow began to glow a rich amber. Then, when it was pointing roughly upstream, the metal pulsed and a flush of blue ran down the glass. They stood transfixed as its cool radiance lit up Richard's palms.

"It glows strongest in that direction," Richard said, "where that awful wailing is coming from."

In their excitement at their surprise find, the three had ignored the strange noise.

"Let's go," Orkan said with an impatient shrug, "we'll look at Melek's book later."

"All right," Richard said, returning the Path Finder to Melek, who slid it into its hiding place. The dwarf lifted the heavy book back on to his small shoulders.

Cries for help

The three trudged through the dusty grassland, following the river at a wary distance. The vast clearing stretched in a wide crescent fringed by the forest. After a while, shrubs sprouted here and there. The boulders became fewer. Then the river widened into a large, clear lake.

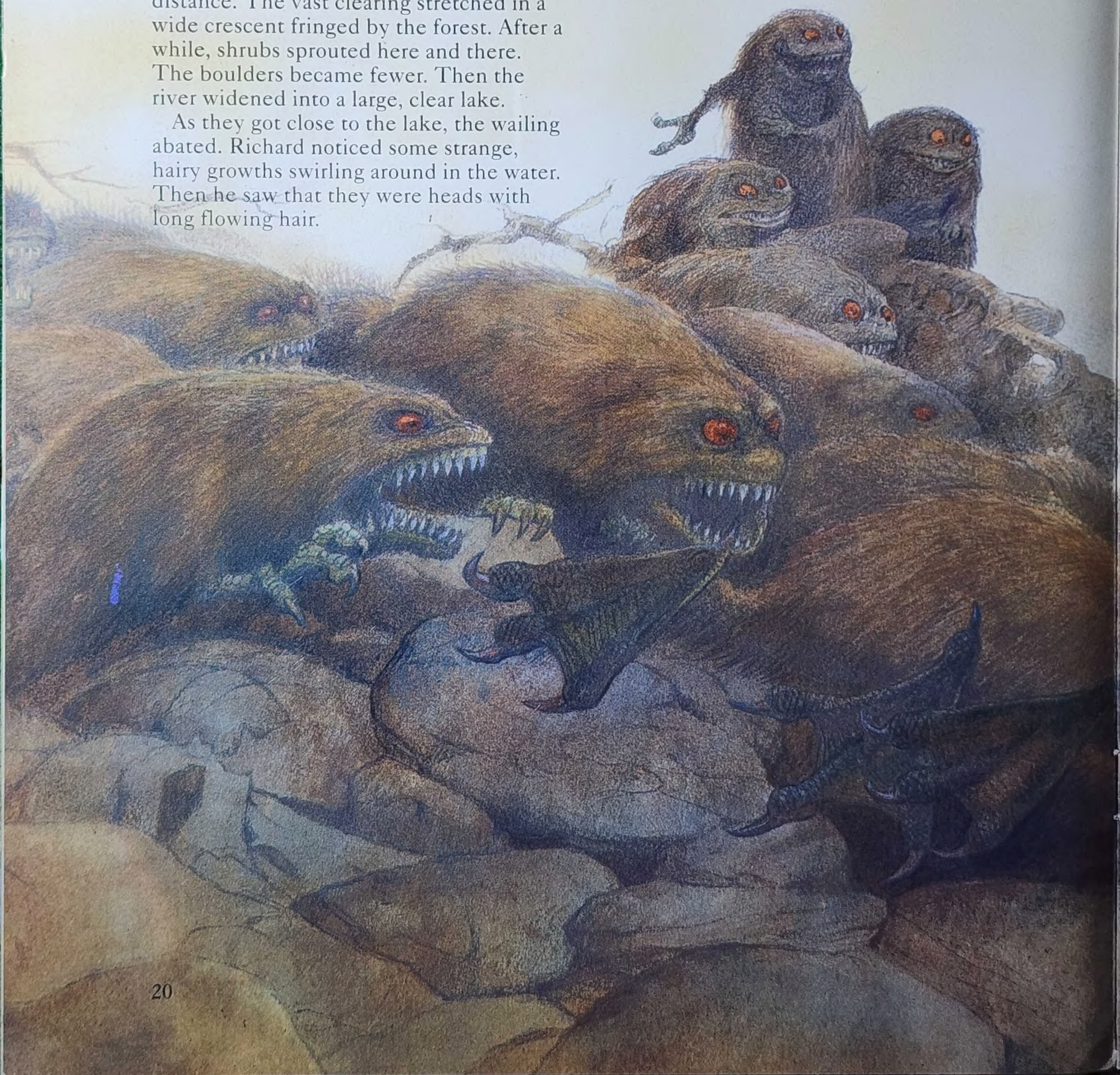
As they got close to the lake, the wailing abated. Richard noticed some strange, hairy growths swirling around in the water. Then he saw that they were heads with long flowing hair.

Suddenly the heads rose in unison, and their piteous cries for help filled the air again. "Help us! Save us!"

Richard turned around. "They must be drowning. Quick, Melek, your rope."

"Wait!" Orkan said."They could be Tolosh. Get down, both of you. Now!" Following Orkan's example, Richard and Melek threw themselves to the ground.

"What's wrong?" Richard hissed.



"Ssh. Over there," Orkan said. "Look."

They saw a tall figure in rough blue battledress approaching the lake. As the figure drew near the water's edge, the voices started pleading with him.

"Help us! We're trapped!" Now that he was closer, the trio could see a face with high cheekbones, yellow skin and almond-shaped eyes that glinted in the sunlight.

"A leopardman!" Orkan murmured.

The figure bent towards the water and stretched out his hand.

Then it happened. Suddenly the leopardman's face contorted with horror. As the three looked on, they saw the almond-eyed traveller being pulled into the midst of the wailing figures.

"Look over there!" Melek pointed across the lake.

"As I thought!" Orkan growled.

Richard followed their gaze. The bank of dead grass was beginning to move. It stirred in clumps and tussocks, until the whole lakeside appeared to be alive. As it

rippled and ruckled he saw that it was not grass at all, but hair. As Richard watched spellbound, the mass of hair separated into individual heads that rose on tiny, doll-like bodies. When their mouths opened, Richard's heart gave a jump, and he forgot any comparisons that he might have made with dolls.

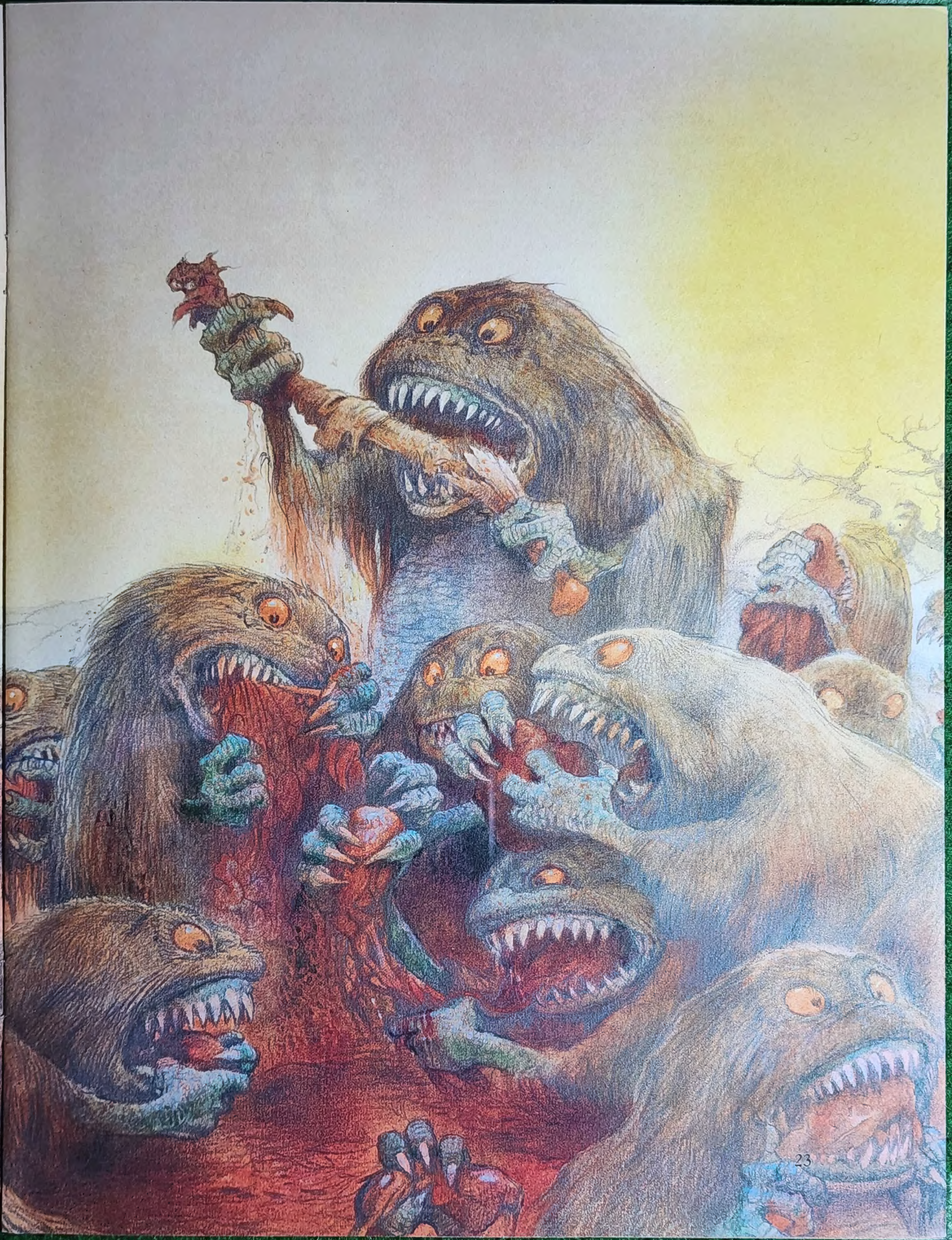
Feeding frenzy

It looked as if the creatures' heads were about to split in two, revealing gaping chasms lined with serried ranks of sharp, shark-like teeth. One by one, the creatures slid like otters into the lake. Only the barest ripple revealed their presence beneath the surface.

Suddenly the leopardman gave a convulsive jerk and disappeared from sight. A second later he re-emerged, waving an arm that ended at his elbow. His face screwed up in pain as blood spurted from his amputated limb.

The water became a boiling, snapping fury of piranha-like Tolosh. The long-haired creatures had joined in the feeding frenzy. The traveller came out once again, but this time he was unrecognizable beneath a seething coat of wet fur. Then he went down for the final time.

Within seconds the lake was calm. All that remained of the traveller was a red bloom that spread smokily through the water before drifting idly downstream. On the opposite bank, the Tolosh were out of the water and drying themselves in the sun. Before long, they were once more invisible against their surroundings. Those in the water had grown silent, waiting for another victim.



For a while, the three were numb with shock, then Orkan broke the silence.

"I was going to tell you about the Tolosh when that leopardman came along," he said glumly. "They hide near water and use decoys to trap unsuspecting travellers. They pretend to drown, or be in trouble and plead for help. On land they're harmless, but in the water . . . well, you saw for yourselves what they're capable of."

"I wonder if this was in the *Book of Prophecies*?" Melek muttered. Then riffling through the pages, he read aloud.

"Rock conceals and grass deceives
But Heroes win the day.
An arrow gold behind the leaves
Shows the brave the way.
Peril, water, death await.
Avoid the tempting hand.
Purple eyes that have no fate
Twice arrive but not too late
To pluck from death the shining Grail
And lead them to another place."

Melek and Orkan turned questioning eyes towards Richard.

Richard thought for a moment. "The first two lines make sense, but the rest . . . I'm not sure. Could it be your arrows, Orkan? No. Yours aren't golden."

He looked over Melek's shoulder, frowning at the old-fashioned script.

"I've got it. The Path Finder! That's shaped like an arrow, isn't it? Avoid the

tempting hand, water and death, must be a warning about those Tolosh. I don't understand the purple eyes twice, though."

"I think we should move on now," Orkan shrugged. "The trouble is, I don't know this area too well."

"There's someone coming!" Melek cried. "We've got to warn him."

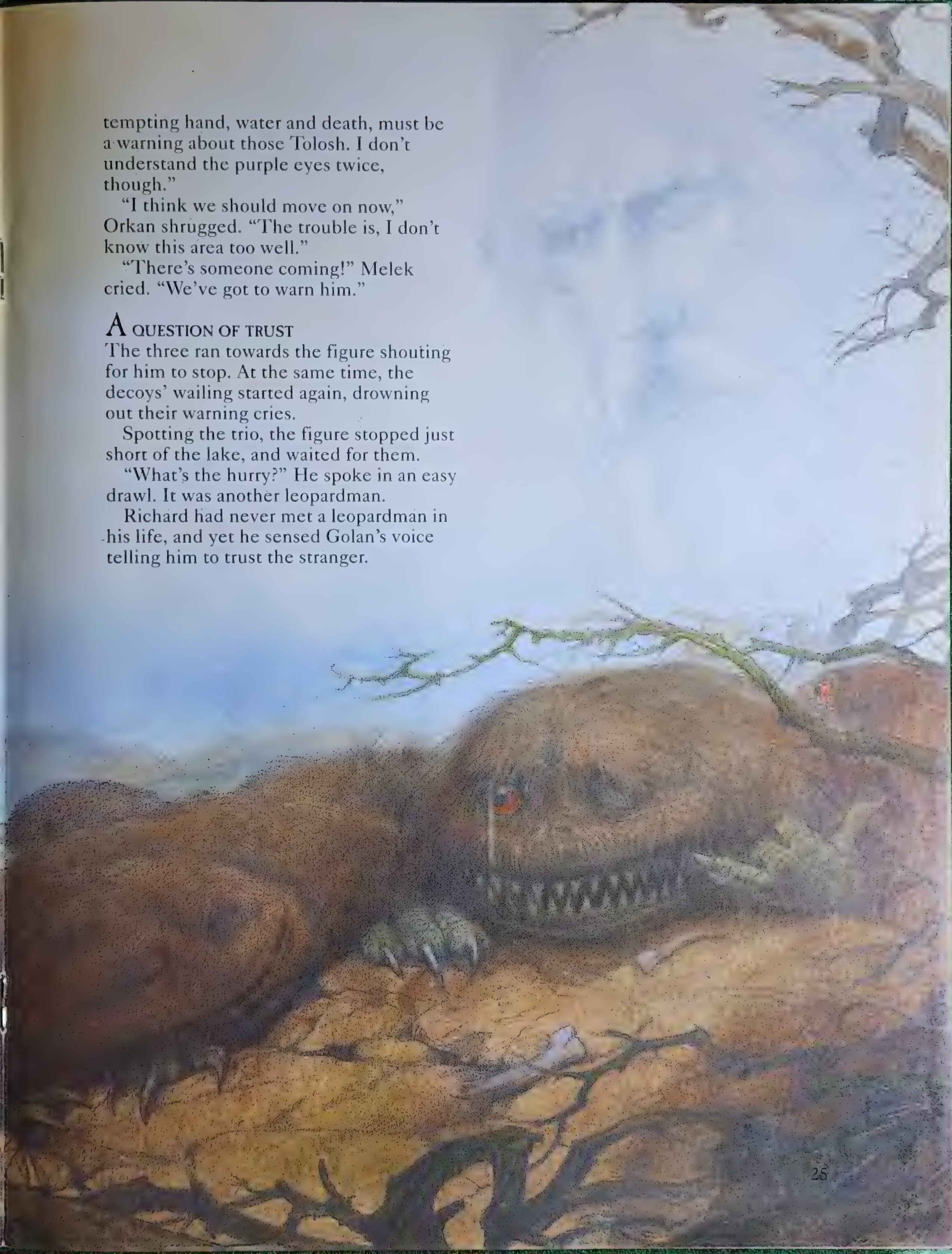
A QUESTION OF TRUST

The three ran towards the figure shouting for him to stop. At the same time, the decoys' wailing started again, drowning out their warning cries.

Spotting the trio, the figure stopped just short of the lake, and waited for them.

"What's the hurry?" He spoke in an easy drawl. It was another leopardman.

Richard had never met a leopardman in his life, and yet he sensed Golan's voice telling him to trust the stranger.



Then Richard noticed his eyes. They were purple, as in the riddle.

"Tolosh!" Richard panted. "There's Tolosh in the lake."

"Tolosh?" the stranger queried.

The decoys were still wailing and pleading, "Help! We're stuck in the mud! Please help us."

"Don't listen to them," Richard said. "They've just eaten a leopardman who went to help them."

"That must have been Rabat," the stranger said. "He went on ahead of me. He was a good fighter." He looked down for a moment, then he raised his head. "My name's Merkat, by the way. And you are?" Suddenly, his dagger came to rest against Richard's windpipe.

In mortal danger

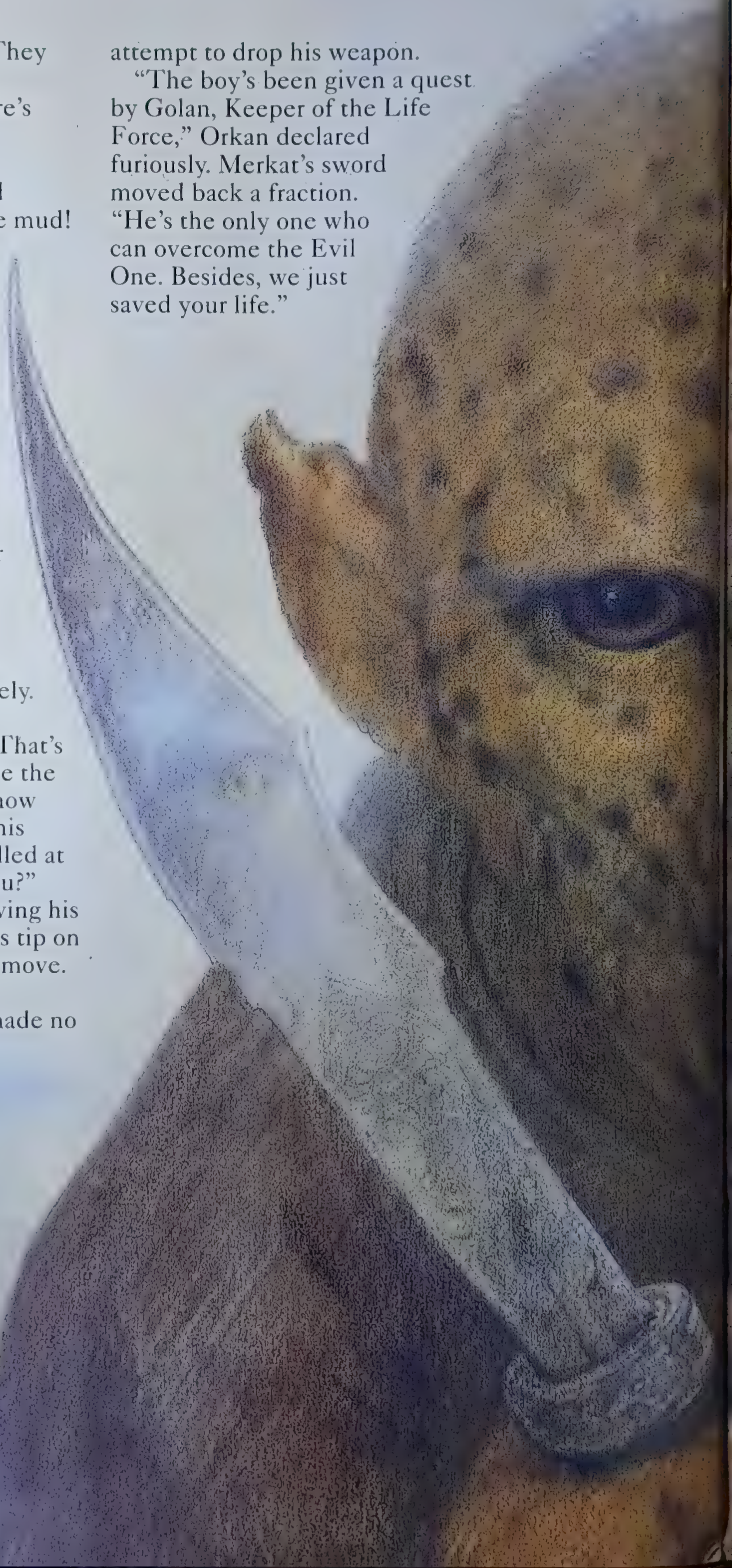
"Let him go!" Melek shouted bravely. "He's the Chosen One!"

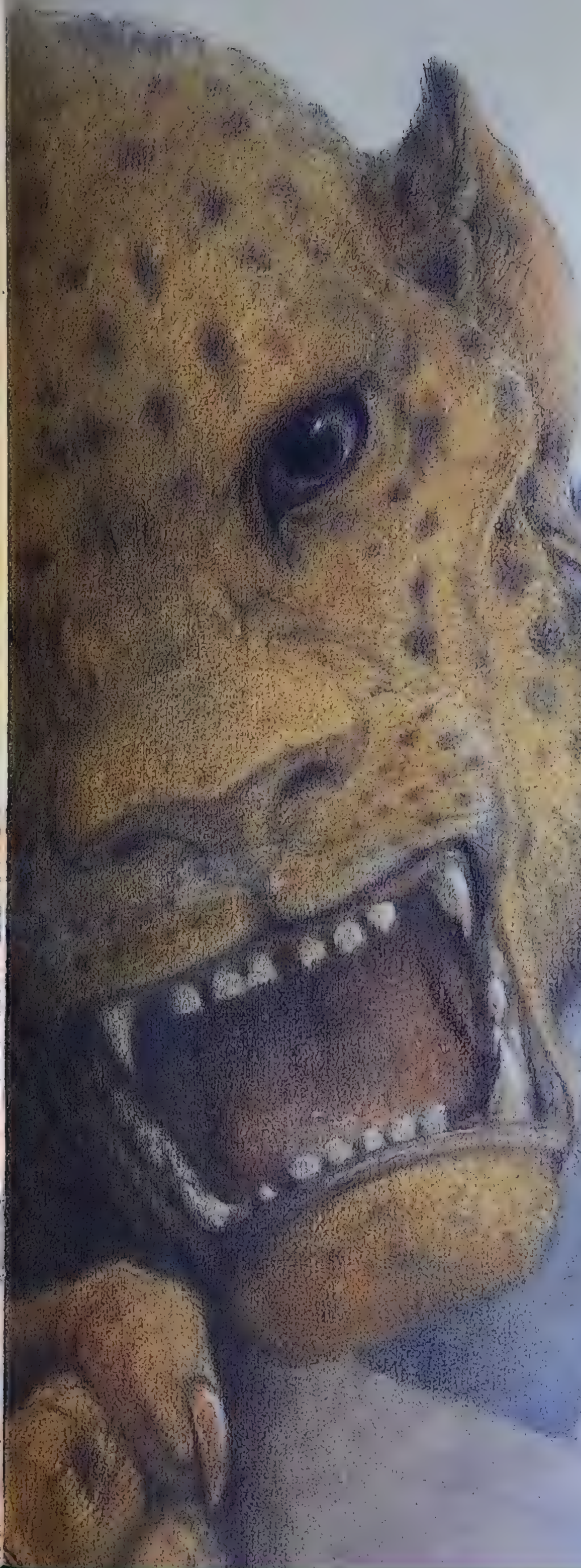
The purple eyes slid sideways. "That's easy to say. I'll kill this fool and slice the rest of you to ribbons before you know what's happening." He pushed on his dagger so that a trickle of blood welled at Richard's throat. "Now. Who are you?"

"Just a minute," Orkan said, drawing his sword so quickly that Merkat felt its tip on his heart before he had a chance to move. "Harm the boy and you're dead."

Merkat glared at Orkan, but he made no attempt to drop his weapon.

"The boy's been given a quest by Golan, Keeper of the Life Force," Orkan declared furiously. Merkat's sword moved back a fraction. "He's the only one who can overcome the Evil One. Besides, we just saved your life."





"Hmm," Merkat sneered. "Perhaps I do owe you one." He gestured towards the lake and sheathed his dagger. Richard breathed a sigh of relief and touched his throat. There was no real harm done, but now he felt cold and tired. Richard wondered whether he would be able to see the quest through.

A new ally

"I am a man of honour," Merkat said proudly, "you saved my life, so I'll do anything I can to help you."

"We're looking for the Life-Force pods," Richard said with relief.

"What do these pods look like?" Merkat asked.

"They're small and smooth," Richard explained, "and dark and shiny. The prophecy says, 'Pluck from death the shining Grail'. Well, the Holy Grail is what King Arthur's knights searched for, just as we're searching for the pods. Plucking from death," Richard nodded towards the creatures, "could mean that they have the pod in there."

The sound of splashing echoed from the lake. The Tolosh decoys had been listening to their conversation.

A plaintive whine came from the decoys. "We can help you. There's a pod in a casket at the bottom of the lake. You just need to dive for it. Come, we'll show you where it is."

Tricking the Tolosh

Merkat's eyes narrowed to venomous slits. He strode towards the water, and aimed his spear. It missed the decoys.

"Wait," Richard said, "they'll kill you just as they killed your friend. Look over there." He pointed to the opposite bank where the grass was already beginning to heave. "I have a better idea."

Richard spoke with Melek and Orkan, then to the long-haired creatures in the

water he said, "How do we know you have the pod? I'll come in and get it, but first I want to see it."

By now the Tolosh were plopping into the water in anticipation. One decoy gave a nod and beckoned to the others. Then she disappeared under the water.

While Richard and his companions stared out over the lake's glassy surface, the decoys swam down to the underlying ooze. They moved with sinuous ease, turning and wriggling, eel-like in the underwater currents. They were no longer decoys, but true water Tolosh.

Their faces showed the same, rapacious teeth as the land Tolosh, but their skin was more hideous. A lifetime spent in the water had rotted their features to a pulpy grey mass. Eyes bulged like gluey balls. Lips had become scaly strips of flesh. Noses were little more than collapsing blobs of gristle. On some, the chin had fallen away to leave nothing but bare bone.

Down they swirled to the bottom of the lake where, amidst a mass of weeds, lay a half-buried casket, its surface covered with slime. Shrivelled hands probed eagerly at its lock, flung open the lid and snatched a small object from within. Then, in a flurry of

activity that whirled clouds of silt into the clear water, the Tolosh sped upwards and held up the pod.

"Bring it closer," Richard commanded.

The decoy swam towards the shore.

"Now!" Richard shouted.

Precious prize

In Orkan's practised hand, Melek's rope whipped through the air. It wrapped itself round the decoy's wrist, which instantly reverted to its hideous form. He gave a sharp tug and the pod flew from her hand, then Richard snatched it out of the air.

"Got it!" he cried triumphantly. Orkan, Melek and Merkat crowded around him.

The Tolosh shrieked and thrashed the water, then they fell silent.

Richard stored the pod in his bag. "One down, five to go!" he grinned at the others. "I can't believe we've done it!"

Orkan smiled. "I don't think we should hang around here. Which way next?"

Melek pulled out the Path Finder and handed it to Richard. Once again, the colours in the small arrow trembled into life before the tip turned faintly golden.

"This way," Richard murmured.

"There's a riddle about the Path Finder somewhere in the *Book of Prophecies*," Melek said. "Next time we stop, we'll have to find out exactly how it works."

As Melek slid the Path Finder back in the spine of the book, Orkan turned to Merkat, "What's up ahead?"

"Forest, to begin with. I can show you the way through. By the look of you lot, you've already had a hard journey."

Battle-weary trio

For the first time, the three realized what a battle-weary spectacle they must make. Richard and Orkan were smeared with dried slime from their encounter with the Moss Beast, and Melek was caked with

mud. The trek across the grasslands had laid a sprinkling of red dust on all of them.

As they moved off, Richard told Merkat his story from the beginning.

"Impressive," Merkat said, "but your troubles are not over yet." He nodded ahead, to where the outriding trees of a large forest rose from the plain, "This is where the real test starts – for all of us."

Hostile territory

After the brightness of the grassland, the forest gloom left Richard feeling disorientated. It was good to be under cover once again, but here, the dark foliage could hide anything.

The three followed their strange guide as he led them deeper into the trees.

"Keep close behind me," Merkat muttered, "and tread exactly in my footsteps. There's something I don't like here. The forest feels different – the paths seem to have changed. Everything's quieter. The trees look greyer. I can't help feeling we're being lured into a trap."

"Seems we're doing fine for now anyway," Richard said.

"Oh no we're not," Orkan broke in. "Listen!"

From deep in the forest they heard a thundering, crunching sound as if something large was moving through the undergrowth. The noise had a rhythmic quality, like a squad of soldiers marching in step.

"Could be Cozards!" Merkat hissed. "The Evil One's stormtroopers! If it is, we're really in trouble. Quick, into this thicket over there."

Orkan plunged into a clump of thorn trees, burrowing his way through at ground level, where the branches were sparsest. Richard and the others tunnelled swiftly after him.

WAITING IN DREAD

At the heart of the thicket was a small space, where some animal had made its lair in the past. Here the four waited in dread as the thundering noise came nearer. Then, when the sound was almost on top of them, it stopped abruptly. They crouched as still as they could, hardly daring to breathe.

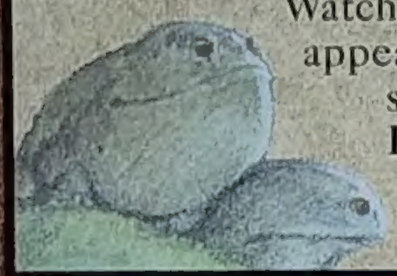
From outside came a curious high-pitched whistling, as if a train had just let off a head of steam. It lasted almost a minute before petering out into silence. Richard had never felt more afraid in his life. He stared at the thorns in front of him, willing whatever was out there to go away. It did not work. As he prayed, the whole thicket was ripped open with terrifying force.

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

Look out for these friendly little creatures again. They are hiding somewhere in the pages of this issue. Look even closer, and you will find more creatures concealed in the illustrations. Watch out for the faces, they often appear where you least expect to see them.



In issue 1, Shoomi and Shoobi were on the inside front cover and on page 4.

3-Minute Challenge

Mask of Evil

Can you find three fragments of the Evil One's mask hidden somewhere in the illustrations in less than three minutes?

In issue 1, the fragments were on pages 2 and 9.

Monsters and Magic

Read about Gilikango and Rusalki on Morbane's story cards, then decide which of these creatures the Tolosh are based on.

In issue 1, Sumar was based on Nya Nya.

Puzzle Map

Cut out the three puzzle pieces and fit them on to your Ancestral World map poster.

Power of Evil – Competition

Cut out the letter blocks and keep them safe. When you have 26, you will get a clue to help you form them into a phrase which reveals the source of the Evil One's power.

Competition details will appear in future issues.

Monster Might

Use your first 8 Monster Might cards to play Pod Quest. Other games will appear in future issues.

Pod Quest

A game for two players using the Megatron Power ratings on your first eight **Monster Might** cards.

Aim To be the survivor holding the Pod card with at least one card to protect it.

How to Play

1 Shuffle cards and place face down.
2 First player to turn over an Evil suit is Evil. He takes the Evil cards and Pod card. The other player is Good and takes remaining Good cards.
3 Evil holds up cards, without showing monsters. Good points to an Evil card which Evil brings to the top of his set – still without naming monster – to defend the Pod.

If Opponent points to Pod card, he takes it and points to another Evil card to take up the challenge and recapture the Pod.

4 Good chooses his own character to battle for the Pod and brings it to top of set. Good looks at Megatron Powers and names category for combat, i.e. Size, Strength, Magic, Good, Evil.
5 Evil names monster chosen to defend Pod and reveals power rating in the category called.
6 The player with the lower rating loses the challenge, his character is vanquished and the card placed face down.
7 The player with the higher rating points to a new card in Opponent's set to take up the challenge for the Pod.
8 The battle continues until one player is left without any cards. To win, a player must hold the Pod and at least one character to defend it.

Rules

• The same category cannot be called twice in succession • The Pod may change hands several times – or not at all • If either force is left holding only the Pod, that force loses.

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A Marshall Cavendish Collection
In Fortnightly Parts
The Ancestral Trail
An Epic Story of Myths, Magic and Monsters
3 Baal the Giant Spider
Caught in a Sticky Web of Evil
Julek Heller

In Issue 3

Baal the Giant Spider

The daring trio and their new ally come face to face with a monstrous spider. But there is even more danger ahead in Baal's sticky domain.

plus

Morbane recalls what happened when Arachne stood up to a goddess, and tells us about a spider that creates storms.

Tokens and locator cards for **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game.

FREE

MONSTER MIGHT
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Mirra the Magician

Magic and mayhem await our heroes in the City of Stone. Will Mirra make them part of her dreadful collection or will they outwit the cunning magician?

plus

From Morbane – how Perseus stared out Medusa. What happened when King Midas got his wish • More tokens and locator cards.

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